

Australia's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Report

3 – 14 October 2015



Eastern Grey Kangaroo



Short-beaked Echidna



Sugar Glider



Tasmanian Pademelon

Report compiled by Alan Gillanders & Nick Mooney
Images by Shutterstock



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Participants: Alan Gillanders (Mainland) & Nick Mooney (Tasmania) with nine Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 2nd October

In flight

Day 2

Saturday 3rd October

After loading people and possessions onto our bus we headed for the picturesque village of Yungaburra which was to be our base for the next three nights. On the way a stop was made to view Agile Wallabies living in suburbia. Bush-stone Curlews and Pied Imperial Pigeons added to the joy.

Once settled into their rooms most travellers walked along Petersen Creek, seeing Platypus, on their way to dinner. Some were lucky enough to view Water Rat and Green Ringtail Possum as well. First stop after dinner was under the bridge to watch the Fishing Bats before we went spotlighting which turned up Coppery and Common subspecies of the Common Brushtail Possum, Green Ringtail Possum, Long-nosed & Northern Brown Bandicoot and Giant White-tailed Rat.

Day 3

Sunday 4th October

Some guests again saw Platypus on their early morning walk along Peterson Creek and one was very excited about having been close to a Red-bellied Black Snake. Northern Long-eared Bats were found roosting in a picnic shelter.

The search for Red-legged Pademelon was not as successful as would have been desired as some had only fleeting views of these shy rainforest wallabies. A visit to a family of habituated Lumholtz's Tree-Kangaroos was more rewarding.

From there a scenic drive took to a beautiful waterfall and to a fish farm where we all had good views of Platypus living in their spring fed dam. Fresh fish, smoked fish and crayfish were on the menu as we all thwarted starvation again.

The afternoon was mostly absorbed in bird watching. The Golden Bowerbird is the smallest of the bowerbirds but capable of building the largest structure. We visited a bird which was quite relaxed about our presence while we inspected his handiwork. After dinner we dashed through the rain to Mt Hypipamee where we added Lemuroid Ringtail Possum, Herbert River Ringtail Possum, Yellow-bellied Bat and Bush Rat to our growing tally. In nearby tall eucalypt forest we saw Yellow-bellied Glider and Sugar Glider with both species of bandicoot showing again.

Day 4

Monday 5th October

Lake Barrine is a wonderful nature spot where we saw many birds including the amazing Tooth-billed Bowerbird which creates riffs of mimicry to attract a mate. Unfortunately only a few added Hynsi (Musky Rat-Kangaroo) to

their list and most of those did not get wonderful views. These little, strictly diurnal frugivores have suffered because of the recent cyclones diminishing fruit supplies during the breeding season.

In the afternoon many guests visited the Bat Hospital where they witnessed the great conservation work being done by the people of that institution.

Day 5

Tuesday 6th October

Our visit to Lake Eacham was even less successful than yesterday's attempt to find Hynps but more people obtained good views of Red-Legged Pademelon. At Granite Gorge we met with the many wild but thoroughly habituated Mareeba Rock Wallabies, some of which had large pouch young. A variety of interesting birds were seen here including a Great Bowerbird, making our fourth species for the trip. Eastern Grey Kangaroo inhabit the golf course in Mareeba. Out at the Mareeba Wetlands we were lucky enough to encounter Antilopine & Common Wallaroo and Whiptail Wallaby during the day.

The only mammals seen after dark were Little Red on the Tablelands and Spectacled Flying Fox on the coast.

Day 6

Wednesday 7th October

After breakfast the guests were escorted to the airport and assisted with the electronic check in before their flight to Hobart.

Overall it was a very successful part of the tour on the mainland with 25 species of wild mammals seen by at least one guest and identified to species level with a high level of confidence. Most species were seen by all guests. Add to those 126 birds, four reptiles, one frog, five butterflies and various other invertebrates including a huge spider and even bigger grasshopper recorded.

Day 6

Wednesday 7th October

All Naturetrekkers arrived on time at Hobart airport with all baggage on a fine spring evening. A quick check in and dinner at Salamanca Inn then off for a spotlight walk at Waterworks Reserve where all were introduced to Tasmania's most common marsupials - Tasmanian Pademelons (aka Rufous Wallaby), Red-necked Wallaby (aka Bennett's Wallaby) and Common Brushtail Possums, the latter of several colour morphs. Southern Boobooks, our smallest owl, were heard although not seen.

Day 7

Thursday 8th October

Early the next morning we went south to catch the 09:30 ferry to Bruny Island, encountering the first of very many road-kills, something Tasmania is famous for and which somewhat reflects the high abundance of small to medium marsupials. The bird list steadily grew with sightings of Masked Lapwings, Yellow Wattlebird, Green Rosella, Brown Falcon, Laughing Kookaburras, Tasmanian Native-hens, some with little black chicks, and a Great Egret, Great and Black-faced Cormorants, Kelp and Silver Gulls en route to Bruny. We took a circuitous route to Inala, extending the bird list with Strong-billed and Black Headed Honeyeaters, Sooty and Pied

Oystercatchers, Beautiful Firetail (Tasmania's only native finch) and White-faced Heron. We had lunch at the Cape Bruny lighthouse, hoping to find a Short-beaked Echidna but settling for many New Holland Honeyeaters, Dusky Robins and Dusky Woodswallows, a She-oak Skink (aka Slender Bluetongue) and some offshore Australasian Gannets and Pacific Gulls. Although many fresh echidna digs were found, some with the characteristic elongated nose shape, we were unsuccessful in finding one

Mid-afternoon we had a brief stop at Cloudy Bay and saw the endangered Hooded Plover courting and many Kelp Gulls bathing. Arriving at Inala we quickly recorded many more birds including Flame and Scarlet Robins, Green Rosella, Superb Fairy Wrens and indulged ourselves with Striated, Spotted and Forty-spotted Pardalotes, the latter as endangered as it is tiny. Dr Tonia Cochran, owner of Inala, showed us her orphaned joey wallabies and we had an intimate look at a group of Red-necked Wallaby near her house, many with large joeys protruding from pouches. A camera trap was set at a feed station for raptors and then we were off to dinner at the local pub. A brief side track en route gave us a spectacular white Red-necked Wallaby for which Bruny is famous.

After dinner we did a night drive to far northern Bruny seeing at least 12 Eastern Quolls of both tan and black morphs, the latter including a tiny, newly weaned individual. A Tawny Frogmouth (a giant nightjar) was seen at close quarters, also a Long-nosed Potoroo (with distended pouch) and 3 blond Common Brushtail Possums amongst a myriad of other possums and wallabies and another camera trap was set. A special treat was a short spotlight walk (with red beams) to check out the Little Penguins at The Neck colony, also seeing a lone Short-tailed Shearwater (muttonbird). The night was crystal clear, providing stunning skies with a very clear Southern Cross and Pointers.

Day 8

Friday 9th October

An early pick up from our Bruny Island Cottages and it was breakfast at Inala and more birds including Wedge-tailed Eagles. Then it was off to the ferry via a White-bellied Sea-eagle nest in Adventure Bay (a telescope check revealed two adults on the nest) at last seeing our first Short-beaked Echidna. Camera traps were picked up en route, a quick check of their cards showing Brown Falcon, Wedge-tailed Eagles and a feral Cat on the one at Inala and Eastern Quoll, Long-nosed Potoroo, Common Brushtail Possum and Black Rat on the other on north Bruny.

We headed to Salamanca Place for lunch and/or a visit to the Thylacine display at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Then it was Gould's Lagoon seeing many waterfowl including Australian Shovelers, Blue-billed Duck, Grey and Chestnut Teal, Pacific Black Duck, Eurasian Coot, Eastern Swamphehen, along the Derwent River seeing hundreds of Black Swan (some with grey cygnets), Little Black Cormorant, arriving at the Junction Motel at New Norfolk mid-afternoon. A quick cuppa and off we went Platypus spotting where, to everyone's delight, we saw a very nonchalant Platypus at a range close enough for us to see it clearly foraging along the pond bottom.

Dinner was a delightful BBQ at the Waterfall Cafe, Mt. Field National Park then a walk through beautiful rainforest with immensely tall eucalypts to the famous Russell Falls looking for Pink Robins. We then drove up and up through forest and moorland to the sub-alpine forest at Lake Dobson hoping for a Sugar Glider emerging at dusk but no luck. Spotlighting back down the mountain there were many young Common Brushtail Possums and a few of the group did get a quick look at a half grown Tasmanian devil as an unexpected bonus.

Down at the mountain base we searched unsuccessfully for Eastern-barred Bandicoot but saw up to 100 Tasmanian Pademelons and Common Brushtail Possums and lone Eastern Quoll and Tawny Frogmouths. Then it was off back to New Norfolk with a side excursion to Ellendale where some of the group had a brief but clear view of a Tasmanian (or Eastern) Bettong, a charismatic little macropod unusual because it is largely fungivorous and can carry nest material in its prehensile tail curled downwards.

Day 9

Saturday 10th October

The morning found us heading toward Cradle Mountain National Park seeing 9 echidnas en route, including a very a confused immature that our guide rescued from the middle of a busy four lane highway and one very bold individual in the northern midlands which casually walked through the quiet and still group sniffing boots. Lunch was bought from the magnificent Ross Bakery and devoured adjacent to the heritage listed Woolmer's Cottage near Longford. More birds were seen including the ubiquitous Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Forest Raven and Australian Magpies, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Eastern Rosella, Long-billed Corella and Shining Bronze-cuckoo.

At Cradle Lodge we encountered much anticipated Common Wombats. More spotlighting that night and a Common Ringtail Possum was clearly seen along the Enchanted Walk. Many wallabies and a Common Brushtail Possum with tiny young back-riding were seen in a later night drive. A camera trap was put near the lodge, in the morning showing both Spotted-tailed Quoll and Tasmanian Devil, neither unfortunately being seen in the flesh (not unexpected since Devil facial Tumour Disease has 'crashed' the local devil population).

Day 10

Sunday 11th October

The morning found us off to Dove Lake where we had excellent views of Black Currawong, Tasmanian Scrubwren, Tasmanian Thornbill, Crescent Honeyeater and exquisite little Southern Grass Skinks. A quick lunch at a quiet creek near the lodge gave us Pink Robins and we then took a drive to Lake Lea seeing Richards Pipit, several White-lipped Whip Snakes and found a dead endangered Growling Grass Frog (aka Green and Golden Frog or Warty Bell Frog).

After an early dinner at the lodge, off we went down a side road to forest with very large eucalypts where we watched for Sugar Gliders emerging at last light. No gliders but we did see at least 3 species of bat including Tasmanian Pipistrelle and probably Lesser and/or Greater Long-eared Bats.

Day 11

Monday 12th October

We struck out early today as 3 of our group were to leave, heading to Narawntapu National Park to see the Tasmanian race of Eastern Grey (or Forester) Kangaroo. A pair of elegant but nervous Banded Lapwings were seen on the way and at the park, Grey Currawongs were in abundance, also Fantailed Cuckoo, White-fronted Chat, Yellow-rumped Thornbills Little Wattlebirds, Australian Shelduck, Musk Duck. A walk around the park's lagoon revealed many scats and other traces of Tasmanian Devils, several Copperhead Snakes, a Tiger Snake, many kangaroos with both yearling at foot and large joey in their pouch, a solitary pair of Red-capped Plovers and lone Black-fronted Dotterel and Pied Oystercatchers.

Dropping our friends at Devonport Airport (together with copies of all camera trap photos), it was then off to Warrawee Reserve near Latrobe seeing many Cattle Egrets in breeding plumage en route. As usual, the reserve had small birds in abundance with Olive and Golden Whistlers, Dusky Robins and Moorhens and a Wedge-tailed Eagle pot-hook displaying as a special treat. Nearby, several Platypus were seen at a distance together with a pair of Grey Butcherbirds courting. Visiting another Latrobe reserve we saw another, much larger platypus then we were off to Mountain Valley Wilderness Lodge near Loongana.

At the lodge amongst wattle woodlands alongside a beautiful river we settled in for a nightwatch over roadkills placed as bait. At least 4 different Tasmanian Devils (none with signs of Devil Facial Tumour Disease), 2 Spotted-tailed Quolls and a tan morph Eastern Quoll were seen at various times from 2130 right through the night. One 'treker' had the use of an FM intercom to alert him to visitors to the bait. Camera traps were placed and numerous photos of devils and quolls obtained.

Day 12

Tuesday 13th October

Extension for some group members

We had a predictable, slow start, heading off to Wynyard to check a nest site of the beautiful Grey Goshawk (all white in Tasmania) seeing road killed Southern Brown Bandicoot and Masked Owl on the way. No luck there but it was a great excuse to have local fish and chips amongst a cacophony of endangered Swift Parrot chatter in the Blue Gums flowering overhead. Back to Bernie's famous Fernglade Reserve and another goshawk nest where at a safe distance, we were lucky enough to see an incubation changeover (male to female) through a telescope. Further down the reserve we encountered a flock of 61 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flushed by a pair of White-bellied Sea-eagles; fantastic stuff! Returning to Mountain Valley we passed a pair of Swamp Harriers courting over a small swamp, sky-dancing with legs extended down, clearly intending to nest there. The last night back at Mountain Valley we had a post dinner Powerpoint presentation on Devil Facial Tumour Disease then back to patient watching. There was less action at baits that night but both Tasmanian Devils and Spotted-tailed Quolls were again seen and photographed.

Day 13

Wednesday 14th October

The last morning, the 14th, and a relaxing start with a walk to investigate nearby drays of Common- Ringtail Possums, one of which was clearly occupied. Brown Thornbills and Yellow-throated Honeyeaters were in abundance and Black Currawongs gave us a rousing farewell. Then, it was off to lunch and a debrief at Bells Parade, Latrobe, then Devonport airport again where we departed with a few more friends and copies of camera trap pictures.

All in all, 16 species of mammal native to Tasmania were seen alive and another dead as roadkill. Another feral mammal was seen alive and another 2 photographed.

Ninety three species of birds native to Tasmania were seen alive and another as roadkill with another 7 species clearly heard. Nine species of feral birds were seen alive.

Five species of reptile were seen, one species of frog was found dead with another 5 species clearly heard.

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Mareeba Rock Wallaby